background information

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THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICS

(Papers from the Puidoux Conference on the Sources of Christian Social Ethics)

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DEPARTMENT ON CHURCH AND SOCIETY
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Notes on the contents of this issue

In 1955 the historic peace churches conceived the idea of inviting representatives of European Volkskirchen for a theological discussion centering on the issue of Christian pacifism. These have come to be called the Puidoux Conferences because the first was held in the village of Puidoux in French Switzerland. Puidoux IV met in the Kastel Oud Poelgeest, Holland in July 1962, and on this occasion the theme was "The Sources of Christian Social Ethics".

The papers presented on this occasion are so pertinent to the larger ecumenical discussion of social ethics that we have asked permission to publish them in Background Information. They were delivered originally in French and German and it has taken sometime to assemble final drafts and translate the whole into English. Since the World Council of Churches has decided to make the discussion of "Theology in Ecumenical Social Thinking" one of the preparatory themes for the 1966 World Conference on Church and Society, these papers make relevant background reading for that discussion.

To identify the writers: Prof. Hendrik Van Oyen is Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics at the Theological Faculty, University of Basel. (Readers will note that this is only Part I of his paper; Part II will appear in the next number of Background Information which will contain other papers on theology and social ethics.) Prof. André Dumas is Professor of Ethics at the Protestant Theological Faculty, Paris; Prof. J.M. Lochman is Professor of Theology at the John Hus Theological Faculty, Prague; and Dr. Hans Werner Bartsch is a theologian from Germany, well known as the editor of series on Kerygma und Mythos.

FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS OF EVANGELICAL SOCIAL ETHICS

By

Prof. Hendrik van Oyen

The term 'social ethics' seems to me to be not entirely acceptable, as it is not free from objection. The term presupposes a distinction between personal and social ethics. It is based on the sharp division in Lutheran doctrine between the two Kingdoms. The Gospel, however, does not seem to justify the distinction between personal and social ethics. Man, particularly when committed to Christ, is thus from the outset involved in truth and in community with his neighbour. No action of his can be excluded from this and none could be responsibly taken if it led to the detriment of man's relation to his neighbour. We realise that the task of introducing this subject today involves raising a number of fundamental problems arising from the present situation in social and political life, viewed in a Protestant perspective. But these questions must not be regarded a priori as involving a petitio principii of ideological thought, for it would not otherwise be possible to specify the assumptions underlying the distinction to which objection is raised.

I want first to survey the present debate on fundamentals regarding ethics as they refer specially to the problems of state and society, and I shall begin with the so-called "theology of society", briefly indicate its background, and then turn to the various lines of thought which nowadays are tending to take its place: (a) one tendency towards a personalising of the present era; and (b) another towards tackling the problems on the basis of the concrete worldliness of the history of Jesus Christ. This expository part is followe by a brief apercu of how I see the encounter between the message of Jesus Christ and the social situation which I want to illustrate with a number of examples, concerning property and the state.

Ecumenical Ethic of the Responsible Society

It has been rightly pointed out that the W.C.C. theology of the "responsible society" has evolved out of the theory of natural law which subsequently developed along Christian lines. It has been observed that Oldham's formula had great significance as a Christian battlecry after the terrible destruction of all values by the Second World War, and that his programme (as in the case of the great ideologies) seemed to presuppose a quite specific and clearly defined theory, the very programme of the Christian Church and of Christianity itself. At the same time it carefully kept in view the elements of such a programme that was shared with the non-Christian world. At Amsterdam the concept of the "responsible society" was defined as follows: "A responsible society is one where freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order, and where those who hold political authority or economic power are responsible for its exercise to God and the people whose welfare is affected by it."

It should be observed that the formula "responsibility in Christian freedom" is entirely composed of the concepts of freedom, public order and responsibility which spring from the natural law. The ideological nature of this structure was attenuated at Evanston, where first it was pointed out that the "responsible society" was not an alternative social or political system. It was more cautiously described as a criterion "for the assessment of all existing social orders", and then in the same breath this criterion was termed a "guiding principle" indicating the "specific decisions which we have to take". Then was added: "Christians are called upon to lead a responsible life, as God's redeeming act in Christ demands, and that under any order of society, even when the social structure is utterly unfavourable."

The difference between these formulae and the Amsterdam definition is certainly remarkable. There has been a flight away from an ideology, in which society is given a special churchly basis towards a whole series of criteria for testing the social structure, in which Christians must set a good example because of the responsibility placed upon them as a result of the redemption brought about in Christ. Nevertheless, the main ideas are still as follows: freedom, responsibility, criterion, ordo (both in the form of society and state). They form the coordinates of a Christian humanism which diverges from the Catholic Thomist doctrine of natural law to the extent that "the responsible society" still takes account of historical form and the fact that its realisation has been corrupted through sin. In the theory of natural law as conceived by the Thomists, there is available an intact, organic world order (ordo) which constitutes the valid system of human society at all times, and which merely needs to be slightly modified from time to time in order to meet all the relevant demands of history. However, one of the leading collaborators of the World Council of Churches, Professor Wendland, expresses the following view:

> "Protestant social doctrine can only apply a very critical and realistic concept of natural law, on the one hand discerning and recognising the demand of man in society for order, justice, freedom and for mutual rights and responsibilities, and his efforts to attain them; on the other hand ruthlessly showing up the social dimension of his enmity with God, his 'social sin', i.e. injustice, harshness, lust for power and possessions, because these defects poison and destroy the mutual interdependence of mankind as originally created by God." (1)

Here, then, is where the dividing line would in the first instance be drawn between the Thomists and "Christian natural law". Instead of speaking of natural law, we should therefore speak of the law of God, because Christian social ethics are concerned with the maintenance of the eschatological orientation of the divine order. Here too it is assumed that there are specific institutions established by God, such as marriage, the state, work, and so on.

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(1) H.D. Wendland, Botschaft an die soziale Welt, 1959, p.169

These constitute the basis for God's maintenance of this world, and the cornerstones of the social edifice[2] for which the eschatological and "heilsgeschichtliche" finality of these divine ordinances is "of decisive importance". The telos of the institutions (according to this view) is to be distinguished from their historical realisation and perversion thus becoming "daemonic" within their own autonomous realms, by a listening to the Word of God, the word which creates and orders their existence - a listening which stems from Christ and draws its life from him, and which is called (as critical love in thought and action) to assess what forms institutions should be given if they are to serve and preserve man in his shared humanity.

Christian natural law, therefore, is concerned with the critical scrutiny and modification of the constitutions of any particular institutions, so that man is not subjugated and deformed by them.

These remarks given an outline of the theology of society which has gradually grown up round the slogan of "the responsible society". This theology is not derived from the Lutheran basis of such German theology, for there, apart from a number of major social impulses which have their roots in pietism (Wichern, Fliedner, Bodelschwingh, Naumann), a scepticism regarding a Christian-social theory was especially marked (Troeltsch, Naumann, and now Dombois). Social questions, in Germany, are regarded as a matter for home missions and for charitable institutions. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, on the other hand, the Social Gospel Movement, the Christian Social Union and the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC) were the significant precursors not only of Stockholm and Edinburgh but of all the recent trends in Germany and other countries, as regards the basic problems of Christian social teachings, right up to the Assembly at New Delhi.

In this Anglo-Saxon Christian trend, two basic currents converged. On the one hand there was the Calvinistic ideal of the rule of the Kingdom of God over the whole creation, and on the other the claim of natural law (derived from antiquity) as a cosmic order of life, in other words, the ideal of reason. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, it was possible for a Christian social movement to evolve which derived the idea of natural progress from a materialistic belief in salvation ("We must criticise and modify the orders which have become diseased")[3] and also the idea of a Christian-humanist shaping of society, of human rights, self-government, loyalty and adjustment, and the growth of faith through freedom and responsibility exercised in concrete action. As Peabody puts it: "Religion is the way which leads from decision to insight, from duty to vision, from obedience to faith"[4] The personality does not discover faith except in taking decisions and acting. Faith is developed ex opere operando, i.e. in the act itself. And this faith is Christian because it is common to all mankind and is universally valid. What is Christian is also truly human and where the individual attains religious maturity through

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(2) ibid. p. 135

(3) ibid. p. 136

(4) F.G. Peabody, The approach to the social question, 1912, p. 177

action genuine community is created at the same time. Maladjustment is a de-personalised form of society; that is sin. It can be overcome by the correct integration of man into all the institutions of society, once he has become aware of his responsibility. As is well-known, in the Social Gospel opinions differed as regards the extent of this sin. Is it merely the apathy of the individual or is there a supernatural daemonic kingdom of evil incarnate in the capitalist-imperialist system? We do not think we are exaggerating when we say that the tensions in this sphere in the Anglo-Saxon world at the turn of the century are now, via the World Council of Churches and the theology of society, emerging on similar lines in the latest German theology, although it cannot be assumed that the writers in question have a thorough knowledge of the earlier discussions.

If we ask what social aim is in view here, it is clearly summed up in the formula "worldly Christianity". This means that institutions such as the family, the home, the authorities and the schools should form nuclei of orders which serve the world. "Christianity in the world is both the starting point and the path of the proclamation of the Gospel evangelism in to the world".(5) The Church has at its disposal a whole series of advanced strongpoints such as Evangelical Academies, workers' groups, men's groups, rural and youth work, a whole series of charitable institutions which can be the spearhead of missionary influence and thus break up and modify the arbitrariness and autonomy of the secular spheres. The categories of world, society and institution offer opportunities of fundamental importance for missionary work. The Kingdom of God includes them both protologically and eschatologically. What God has pre-ordained in creation is action which will one day bring about the univeral End in the eschatological consummation of the dominion of Christ over all things, and <u>this</u> despite sin which has split up and daemonised the world in the face of God. During the time between its creation and its final salvation, the world is open to the impact of preaching and action based on the Christian message. The world is neither utterly corrupt nor utterly sound and intact. It lies in a twilight area, and therefore constitutes material, varying according to the historical situation, which is capable of being shaped and transformed. Although perverted, daemonised and distorted, God's commands nevertheless contain the elements which (in accordance with the three mandates of polis, marriage and work) can be restored by worldly Christianity, by Christian humanism.

It will be observed that here too the perspective (already noted in the Social Gospel) of the inner capacity for change inherent in the various spheres of society depends on right action being undertaken by men. The given situation can be interpreted as the God-given chance which is there waiting for the Christian, or the Church, to seize it and to direct it eschatologically towards the Rule of Christ.

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(5) Wendland, op cit. p. 32

Influence of Existentialist Theology on Social Ethics

In this connection recent ethical discussions are tending strongly to stress the fact that institutions are capable of being reformed. I should like to mention very briefly a few of the stages of this trend.

The Christian way of life is conceived, on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount, as springing entirely from personal effort and personal responsibility (in the works of Dietrich von Oppen, "Das personale Zeitalter", 1960). As opposed to the marked emphasis on institutional, legal and sacral elements in earlier times, the modern world is characterised by a high degree of mobility and elasticity between persons and institutions. The personal orientation of society owes its origin to the influence of the Gospel:

(a) the Christian Church freed the orders existing at the time of its origin from their magic and sacral status;

(b) it directed their gaze towards the future, and away from the past;

(c) it insisted, in secular life, on the equality of all its members before God (the Communion);

(d) in its awareness of its mission, it set the world before an open horizon, the world which had originally been dominated by awareness of limitation, immobility and cohesion (i.e. institutionalism);

(e) it gave the world a glimmering of a base which lay outside the traditional class structure; as a result, society was torn apart, and everyone stood before God as an individual.(6)

These five are symptoms of the present realities of the social structure but also secularised elements of the Christian community. We cannot speak of a new world as being primarily an industrialised world, but as a personal society implying a personal revolution. For this reason the traditional forms of institutions give way to personal forms of organised collective life - the firm, the cooperative, the association, - all these depend on their remaining open and flexible.(7) It is a person who is responsible for running and directing the organisation, and partnership develops from the mutual responsibility of the various people involved. The nucleus of this partnership is to be found in the first place in the family, which is no longer regarded as an unchangeable institution, but as an extremely mobile and flexible group, i.e. an "organized partnership". It will be observed that von Oppen tries to break down the autonomy of institutions into personal action. The category of person is of central importance, and is the key factor in the whole, since it is demonstrably a genuinely biblical category, as is clear from the Sermon on the Mount.

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(6) D. von Oppen, Strukturfragen der christlichen Gemeinde in der mobilen Welt, ZEE 1961, p.293 ff.

(7) D. von Oppen, Das personale Zeitalter, 1960, p. 53

For the basis of this analysis is the assumption that in the person of Christ man appeared as a person in all his purity, and as men imitate and follow him the traditional, autonomous institutions are transformed into personal forms of organised partnership. The "orders" are planned so as to encourage this personal development. As Von Oppen says: "The historical effects are such that the world has assumed forms which constantly point towards the pure person, not only as a distant impetus centuries back, but at the present time.(8) What we thus have is a personalistic existentialist orientation of institutionalism co-existing in time with Christ, as a pattern of pure partnership. The historical element in this form has become irrelevant. De-mythologisation develops the Christian concept of a reality which is visibly growing towards the realisation of the real Person. The reality in which we live, precisely because it is free and has broken away from accepted and traditional values, is moving towards the shape of the Future.

Behind von Oppen lies a whole row of names centering round Eberhard Grisebach, Rudolf Bultmann and Friedrich Gogarten. Behind them all stands the philosophical influence of Martin Heidegger. An explicit ethical system was provided by Knud Løgstrup. I would like to summarise the position here too very briefly. As far back as Grisebach, an attempt was made (in his ethics) to unmask all institutions, all autonomous forces of an ideological and traditional nature, in order to clear the way to freedom for man as a genuine, acting being. This liberation consists in the transcending of one's self in one's neighbour. Only through the real impact of debate can the institutional element arrive at an understanding of social values. This line of thought is taken a stage further by Friedrich Gogarten in his talk of "the sonship of man". Here lies the secret of how to deal with secular factors, for thanks to our sonship we no longer stand helpless like an immature child when confronted with the powers and principalities of the institutional, but - through irreproachable and sound secularisation - man (now "of age" and acting on his own responsibility) has assumed responsibility for the world and for its transformation into the future that God provides.

Thus man, as he attains his authentic being through action, overcomes inauthenticity of the historical and of secularism by loving his neighbour and by rediscovering his faith in the justification of the sinner.

This tendency, to define the Christian ethos in wholly worldly terms, becomes the existence of living-with-and-for-one's-neighbour in Ebeling and Løgstrup, both under the influence of the philosophy of Heidegger. Ebeling denounces as cowardice and self-deception the belief that we have to think in terms of divine commands. He quotes a saying of Hermann's: "Morality is poisoned at the root as soon as an idea (one, admittedly, which is sacred to all pious men) is made the basis of moral conviction, i.e. the idea that the moral imperative is the command of God"(9) This is characteristic of the anthropological-ontological basing of ethics in the person, an attitude which is markedly

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(8) Ibid. p. 214

(9) G. Ebeling, Die Evidenz des Ethischen und die Theologie, ZThK. 1960, p.318 ff.

stronger in Løgstrup, who dissolves Christian ethics as such into a general ethic of trust and self-surrender to other men, and taking care of them. The so-called social norms of institutions, on the contrary, are constantly changing, and are subject to assessment according to each particular situation, their validity being questioned at every point in history. Opposed to this is the silent but radical demand for self-surrender to others; which the whole social range of moral, legal and conventional obligations tries to obscure and avoid. On the one hand we have received the divine gift of life, with its radical demand; on the other we are constantly in revolt in our social practices against this demand. Our nature demands that we should take care of our neighhour, but at the same time we are constantly revolting against this obligation.

Social Ethics in the Theology of Barth

With the above remarks we have come in touch with a developing discussion that threatens to dissolve the whole social problem into the existential interpretation of the Person as an anthropological factor of creation (the "gift of life"). In this we have arrived at the subjective pole of the tensions referred to above (pages 3 and 4), where can be no further question of a Christian or a Protestant ethic with its own answers. Existence finds in the interpretation of its own being the imperatives profoundly concealed in Being itself.

A procedure which is similar in structure to that of Løgstrup, but which has a completely opposite starting point, is to be found in the ethics of Karl Barth and his disciples. According to Barth, there radiate into reality from the centre of God's Word in Jesus Christ, in concentric circles round this Word, the pointers of the Church's proclamation. However little Løgstrup might have been concerned about the reality of the social structure involved in this, Karl Barth is equally reserved; he conceives of the Word as having a bearing on a concrete situation (thereby avoiding generalisations based on natural law), but does not allow the social facts to decide how the Word is to be directed. For him there is only one reality - the Word of God, which includes God who commands and man who acts. "If we have listened to the Word of God, it must be clear to us that the reality in which the ethical event takes place (as revealed in the Word of God) is no other than its own reality which we do not have to seek and to find, but only to discern it as it is vouchsafed to us in and with this event itself."(10) The history of the Word of God in creation, atonement and redemption is the basic reality, which assumes concrete form in Jesus Christ, and from which every ethical event derives its shape. Barth completely rejects the idea that man can independently discover, construct or define reality. He asks both Brunner and Bonhoeffer how they

(10) K. Barth, Kirchliche Dogmatik, III/4, 1951, p. 29

imagine they know anything about mandates and "orders" - and why Bonhoeffer specifically refers to four; why these four and no others? (11) Of course Barth must sooner or later deal with these "orders" or relationships, but for him they do not represent a reality to be seen alongside the reality of the Word of God. Barth regards reality not from the point of view of protology (the existential method) but from the point of view of the Eschaton - the fulfilment of Time. This too means that the institutions, with their autonomous values, are as it were dissolved. W.D. Marsch (12) speaks of a profound hostility towards institutions on the part of Barth, in his eschatological ethics. "His ethics threaten to exhaust themselves in critical references, in an ecstatic dissolution of standards and in breathless hostility to tradition." In Barth the concept of the analogia fidei constitutes the method which integrates everything; the Word of God in Jesus Christ constitutes the concretissimum of history which, by analogy, supports human existence through grace. All the social structures are to be understood in relation to the existence of Jesus Christ. They are rooted in that, and can only be conceived as the result of that grace. The different fields of social life are related to the divine Event. They only achieve significance if they are regarded from the perspective of Heilsgeschichte, of God's Covenant with man.

We have now reached the point where a completely different discussion is opened up by the objectivity of the Word of God, which once became flesh in Christ and which will ultimately be consummated as the true Reality - carried over into the material realms of human life which are only "real" if they are integrated into the Heilsgeschichte of which Christ is the focal-point. Otherwise they are only "phenomena" whose significance is undeniable but which are theologically irrevelant. Admittedly, any talk about "phenomena" arouses suspicion. It shows that the reins of the system have been too tightly drawn. The basic problems of social ethics cannot be solved apart from God's concrete act of salvation in Christ. As Marsch observes:

> "It is not possible for a neutral observer to determine what constitutes the continuity or binding force of such institutions. It is not the task of theology to catalogue the characteristics of institutions."(13)

True, Barth then tackles specific continuous forms of mutual responsibility such as marriage, work and so on which take on varying institutional characters, as expressions of the divine command of partnership; these need not be confined to tradtional forms (such as monogamy). In particular, it is in the category of law that Barth feels that mutual responsibility becomes institutionalized, through the law of God which in justification shows itself

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(11) W. Schweitzer, Die menschliche Wirklichkeit in soziologischer und sozialethisch theologischer Sicht, ZEE, 1959, p. 193 ff.

(12) W.D. Marsch, Christologische, Begründung des Rechts? Ev.Th. 1957, p. 145 ff.

(13) Ibid. p. 169

itself as bringing order and shape into human life. What is real is grace, but it is also rational. Even more markedly than in the case of Wendland, God's law (Christian natural law) is conceived of by Barth as action which constantly becomes Event through belief in Christ.

In this connection we have specially in mind Karl Barth's semi-Christological analysis of the basis of the State, in which, to be sure, authority is again fully integrated as ordinatio Dei into the particular situation at any given time, but where Barth emphatically asserts that the fact of "authority" is a law of God's grace, because itis a principle bringing order into reality.

Hans Dombois' great work Das Recht der Gnade* (1961) is closely related to Barth's theory of the Word of God, but also strongly influenced by the sacramentalist theology of van der Leeuws. Dombois takes a further step in the dissolution of the ethical problem of institutionalism. If I am not mistaken, Dombois is evolving in a direction which ascribes to the sacramental aspect of justification everything which Barth accepts as ethical guidance, as a divine command to act rightly. Dombois strips Institutions of their ethical content, by integrating the different fields of actual life into the Heilsgeschichte; he does this even more consistently than Barth does. Dombois has distinguished himself by the pains he has taken to ascertain the contents and the definition of institutions in status and actus, and has shown their non-adoptedness by bringing out the integrationist structure of their basic motives. (An institution is like a house; it must be occupied, otherwise it will decay). He points out the nature of law as a form of faithfulness on the one hand, and of grace on the other, deliberately rejecting a positivist interpretation of institutionalism, as well as a metaphysical-idealistic one. Yet we cannot help feeling that, through a complete sacramentalisation of institutions based on the concept of grace, the missionary message and its appeal to the world are impoverished. The existential factor in Dombois' case is no longer to be found in language, as with Ebeling and Løgstrup, but in the law of God's grace, which explains and shapes reality and the world from this pre-existent datum. The relation between the Gospel and the world would thus be the geometrical figure advocated by Barth: the concentric circles of the different spheres of reality centred in the Word of God. On the other hand, it seems to us that the figure of an elipse would be more appropriate if we try to translate into geometrical terms the tension between the Gospel and concrete reality, as Dombois has already suggested.

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* = "The Law of Grace".

SOCIAL ETHICS IN THE BIBLE

By

Prof. André Dumas

I will begin by making three preliminary observations:

1) This conference brings together the traditional and contemporary thinking of two rather different types of church: (a) churches which, within the Reformation, inherited the notion of Christendom and adapted themselves to it in their attempt to be a national Church. This global vision of a society established under the rule of God made them inclined to draw inspiration from the ethico-social régime of the Old Testament, particularly in Calvinism; (b) the Church which was a minority church from the outset, as much from historical situation as from religious conviction. These minority communities tended to emphasize the new régime set up by the New Testament, where the invisible ecclesia no longer coincides with the visible dimensions of the nation amidst which Christians 'camp' as strangers and sojourners. From the beginning, what were later known as the right and left wings of the Reformation thus leant upon the diversely interpreted authorities of the Old and the New Testament for examples for the life of the contemporary Church. (The presence with us here of Russian Orthodox and Baptists should enable us to find certain analogies with this double current in the Western Reformation, in Eastern religious history.)

2) Our meeting forms part of a continuing research into the importance attributed by exegesis and by ecclesiastical practice to certain classic passages of Biblical ethics, for example the understanding of the state in Romans 13 as revived by the work of Strobel, Käsemann, Wolf, Lasserre, etc. The Bible, in Dodd's phrase, is a "pluralist universe". Why then have certain texts been privileged in their ethical application? Has this privilege been favourable to true understanding or has it instead congealed or warped it? Why, for example, do we traditionally rely more on Ephesians 5 than on Corinthians 7 in connection with the doctrine of marriage? Here is the second type of question centred on the history of exegesis as a concentrated reflection of the history of Christian ethics, which I should like to follow up.

3) An ethic implies concrete choices, or more exactly it thematizes intellectually the contest of events which have already happened and of which it is more true to say that they give birth to it than that it ideally shapes them. Just as Jesus Christ was the Word in his being, in his doing and not only in his speaking, so the Christian ethic makes explicit analytically the engagement of life in faith and obedience. In describing the meaning of the forms of the social ethic in the Bible I seek not so much to establish the abstract norms, as could an idealist philosophy which holds out an absolute as the purpose of life, as to bring out the meaning, already lived and still to be better lived, of successive and constant incarnations of the presence of Jesus Christ in the life of his Church.

My research is thus directed by the historical existence of ethical traditions, by the relevance of certain biblical passages, and by an exhortation born of an analysis which nourishes it.

I. Difficulties of the transition from the Bible to an ethical system

There is difficulty in proceeding from Biblical pointers to a social ethic related to the modern world. This difficulty appears sometimes so great that an outside observer may think it impossible to surmount. Thus the leftist Italian writer Elio Vittorini has written "One can see how it is possible to work out a patriarchal moral system suited to the Middle Ages starting from the Bible, or even an individualistic moral code corresponding to the bourgeois and protestant Renaissance. But it is on the other hand rather difficult to see how the Bible could be the source of a new moral system for our time, that would be neither feudal nor bourgeois".

And indeed sometimes we are in danger of repeating, although using more profane and contemporary language, such typically biblical ideas as substitution, covenant, justification, but in this case it is often an exposition of biblical theology rather than a search for an ethic for today. At other times, even when we use a Christian vocabulary we are in danger of adopting a purely humanistic view of society: for example, is the idea of a "responsible society" familiar to ecumenical ears, an alternative based upon God's exhortation to social disorder or is it the expression of a balance of power between capitalist laisser-faire and socialist planning, a sort of 'balanced economy' seeking to conciliate individual initiative and the security of the social organism?

In the former case we are reproducing a biblical perspective which remains in opposition to our society, that is alien to its development. In the second case we make the most intelligent possible reading of our situation. We live it from within, but in this case it is the witness of the Bible which seems to be an addition made when all the elements of appreciation have already been given. One can look to it for confirmation or even correction but not for guiding inspiration.

To escape from this rapidly outlined alternative of extrinsic repetition or unessential addition, I think we need to look in the Bible itself for the transition from God's exhortation to social expression which causes difficulty for us today; in other words to understand that it is impossible for us to formulate our question as "from the Bible to the modern world" (which was the title of the conference in London and at Bossey in 1946 and 1947 in preparation for Amsterdam), but as "the relationship between God and society in the Bible and the possible modern form of that relationship".

The Bible comprises both the setting in motion of the world by God, the constituent revelation, the initial kernel of the Creeds (for example the exodus from Egypt for the Old Testament, according to von Rad, the Lordship of Jesus Christ the vanquisher of death and of powers for the New Testament according to Cullman) and the response, inclusive or erroneous, obedient or rebellious, of man to this challenge from God. The 'foundation' is laid and everyone builds his

"work" on this foundation as St. Paul says in I. Cor. 3:11-19. The Bible contains not only the divine attestation of the foundation, the self-revelation of God, but also the account of the works of the people of God in response to this initiative. It would then in many respects be more accurate and enlightening to say not: "The Bible is the word of God" but "the Bible is the story of God's covenant with man, including the reactions and interpretations of this man". The Bible is God's command with its human echo. It must at once be added that this formulation entails no differences of value, for God makes use both of events which he directs and of interpretations which he causes in order to reveal himself. But such a definition of the Bible has the great advantage of firmly including the human subject in witness to the Word of God, which is not only Word to man but Word with man. In this connection one might say that the error of fundamentalism is not its search for immediacy between the Bible and ourselves, but its misunderstanding of the non-fundamentalist character of the Bible itself from the very start. The Bible is not like an egg, smooth, impenetrable, the egg of total revelation, but much more like an onion, the responses of man constituting the successive skins engendered by the initial seed of God's interventions. The interaction of these constituent events and of the human interpretations constitutes the movement in the Bible from God to man and from man to God.

Four quick biblical examples will make these affirmations more concrete:

1) The priestly account of creation in Genesis 1 insists upon the creative initiative of God, the covenant, the "diatheke" which he establishes towards man. According to this priestly tradition God speaks and acts without man explicitly responding to the great foundation acts of God, whether it be the creation, or the covenants with Noah, Abraham or later Moses. As Zimmerli points out, in this source we have to wait until Genesis 17:17 to hear of a human reaction, (Abraham's inward laughter at the announcement of his future paternity). On the other hand the Jehovist story of the creation in Genesis 2 stresses the consultation, the questioning, the approval and the exclamation of the human partner of the covenant, of the 'syntheke' established with man. For this reason in this story the man is in the first place created alone, before the woman and without her, in order that he shall be obliged to express an opinion himself upon the merit of the creation of humanity in two sexes as affirmed in Genesis 1. From Genesis 2:23 the man reacts to the divine initiative with his cry of wonder: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."

2) The whole of prophecy between 760 and 530 consists of the double interpretation, anterior, full of judgement, and concomitant or consecutive, full of promises, which the prophets make of the central divine event: God leads back his captive people. As Amos 3:7 says, God acts and God reveals the secret of this action to his servants the prophets. Here also then is divine foundation and human consultation, interpretation and reaction.

3) The New Testament is no different in composition, deliberately including as it does the event of Jesus Christ and the understanding, the realization which followed. Therefrom on the part of the first community until the Gospel having been proved in its universalism, from Jerusalem to Rome, the book of the Acts stops abruptly without even telling us what finally became of St. Paul.

4) In a general way the historic discontinuity of the Bible, which comprises at least the two great silent periods of the exile in Egypt and the centuries which preceded the coming of the Messiah, makes one attend to the interpretative existence of man at the heart of the biblical whole. Witnesses live the Word of God in between the founding Words of God. The Bible is made up of the combination of these acts of God, of the human reactions to them, and I shall add, paradoxically, of the silences which separate them.

Our question is thus to be found in the Bible itself, (far from following the setting up of a canon) formulated around a purely divine given: how are we to pass from the order of God to the constitution of a social ethic? We have an ethic engendered through the call of God in the Bible and not an ultimately insurmountable opposition between a Bible, the Word of God only, and an ethic, a later attempt on the part of man to make the world conform to him. The Bible is not only the source but the current, too. The Bible is not externally normative for the church, as though the church were absent from the inside of the Bible. On the contrary, the church in the sense of a people seeking to listen and to obey is engendered with and through the Bible just as the Bible only comes into being for this people and through them. The Bible is thus both foundation and norm of the Church in as much as this Bible already contains the Church which it brings into existence. Barth, who does not always seem to me to have insisted sufficiently upon the intrabiblical presence of the human response, well expresses this inclusive relationship when he writes: "The relationship which effectively exists between the Bible and the Church is founded within itself. It can easily be described, but no argument can demonstrate it. For this relationship is comparable with that which exists between a mother and her child. It has no other foundation than the fact that a certain mother is the mother of a certain child". If the transition from God's order to human realization is thus established and sought in the Bible itself and not later, then two big questions still remain: 1) How can we characterize this transition or these transitions within the Biblical evidence? How can we analytically pick out their meaning starting from the synthetic whole which is available to us? 2) How can we relay this movement in a manner appropriate for our time? How can we rediscover by analogy with the Biblical currents flowing from God to man and from man to God, a perceptible and persuasive pronouncement for contemporary society, which is also invited to live the reality of the covenant between God and the world, but which must ever return for guidance on this point to the times in history when this covenant had prophets and apostles to expound it in a visible Word?

These two questions will dictate the two parts which follow:

1) The discoverable direction of the move towards social ethics in biblical Testimony.

2) The bearing of this upon our situation.

II. The sense of the double Old and New Testament form of social ethics in the Bible

If certain churches have found an easy kinship with the terrestrial extent of society established by God in the Old Testament, if other churches on the other hand have found easy relationship with the supreme moment of the rupture foretold by the New Testament, it is important that, when these different traditions meet, they should make clear to each other the importance of their almost instinctive kinship with this or that part of the biblical testimony. It is all the more important if we believe that these two forms, in many respects very different, have a significance which for us is permanent, in a word, if we believe, also ethically, that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (*), Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20).

I set out then from the hypothesis of a constant relevance of these two forms of an act of God and a response from his people for the Christian moral system, of (no?) radical advance by the New Testament upon the status of the Old Testament such as would make it simply the story of an abolished stage, even a condemned example. But I must specify the exact field in which I believe this signficance to be permanent so as not to lead to confusion at the outset.

I am not thinking of the actual content of the ethic. The two covenants are often contrasted at this point: The Old Testament would be the evidence of the law, of human obedience faced with the radical alternative, the yes or the no of works which will expose man without redress to blessing or cursing: "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord to serve him". (Joshua 24:22 or Deu. 30) In this sense the chosen people is a nation of people separated from sin, etymotogically Pharisees. The New Testament on the contrary would be the witness of grace, of the yes of God's forgiveness responding to the No of man's sin, of the non-alternative but irreversible way which leads always from the cross to the Resurrection. In this sense the holy people is a nation of forgiven sinners. There is thus a radical opposition between the two acts of God and the two responses of man.

I do not believe in the permanent significance of that duality, for a major reason: this duality itself is not biblically founded. According to the Old Testament it is the whole of Israel that is a sinful people, chosen by the pure grace of the love of God, as one sees in the oldest creeds on the meaning of the provocation of Israel to existence by God: "Your Father was an Amosite and your Mother a Hittite" (Deu. 25:5, 7:7, Ezekiel 16:3, 45). Israel was raised up by grace and not by works. St. Paul recalls this when he underlines the fact that Abraham preceded Moses by 430 years (Gal. 3:17). At the heart of the Old Testament as of the New is to be found the love of God and the love of one's neighbour: Leviticus 19:18 teaches long before the Sermon on the Mount "you shall love your neighbour as yourself".

(*) I take prophets here in the Old Testament sense in spite of Ephes. 3:5 which speaks of 'apostles and prophets' in the New Testament sense; Kittel, K.L. Schmidt, Rengstorf believe in the O.T. meaning in Eph. 2:20

Conversely, the New Testament in its turn contains calls to obedience accompanied by threats, if God's command is mocked. The story of Ananias in Acts 5 is not so different from that of Achan in Joshua 7. Certainly, there are differences of emphasis between the two covenants but not a radical duality of content which could have any permanent significance for us, since the content of grace is everywhere primary and the consequence of disobedience is equally serious everywhere.

Having relativized this first possibility of significant duality I should equally like to relativize a second which is just as frequently mentioned. According to this opinion the Old Testament had an ethic of visibility. Circumcision, a sacrament inscribed in the flesh, was considered to constitute the nation-church whose apogee upon earth was manifested by the territorial and temporal Kingdom of David. This governmental theocracy concentrated on the King, upheld by the prophet, would be the Old Testament ideal. On the other hand, the New Testament would be held to proclaim the Kingdom of the Son of David which does not come from this world and does not establish itself in this world in a way which is clearly visible. The supreme day of the coming of this Kingdom is not the entry into Jerusalem, David's capital, on Palm Sunday, but the nailing to the cross outside the city gates of the King veiled from glory. Baptism, the invisible sacrament of water and of the spirit is the sign of the Church, a mystery hidden with Christ in God and only accessible to faith.

Of course, here also the distinctions between the two testaments are important, but not to the extent of providing a convincing permanent and above all significant duality for our present-day Christian ethics. Indeed the whole of the Old Testament is a struggle against the confusion between the assurance and the visibility of election. David is not the King of established power that these caricatures of Messianic Kingship who preceded and followed him, Saul, Absalom and Salomon, wanted to be. David is already, like Jesus later, the King of grace in weakness or self-effacement. Not all the sons of Abraham in the flesh are automatically so in the Spirit. And conversely the New Testament also aims at the visibility of the Church, when the secret charismata given by God are established in public ministries, when the Church bears in the world or earth the external marks of her calling. In this sense the Old Testament is not only the book of institutions and the New Testament only the testimony of the heart.

It is in a third place that I shall find a permanent and significant duality between the ethics of the Old and the New Testament: This is in their respective stages, on condition that attention is paid to the inherent movement of the ethics which correspond with each.

I will explain: the Old Testament speaks in duration (time). It is the book of genealogical inheritance, or, as Bonhoeffer writes, of the terrestrial and penultimate realities. It is the account of the history of life here below without either resurrection for life beyond where the real encounter with God could take place. It offers no after-life wherein man can live out his redemption since upon this earth, in its duration, its memory and its expectations blessing and cursing are fully unfolded. For this reason the ethical system of the

Old Testament is related to the importance of its institutions: family descent, the ownership of the land, the régime of power, the priestly organization of religion, in a word, incarnation in history.

In complete contrast the New Testament speaks in the instant of fulfilment. It is the book of the last days and the ultimate realities, of eschatology without genealogies. It carries history to the end of its judgement, always accomplished and always imminent. Also the New Testament culminates in this irruption of the beyond into the here and now which is the Resurrection. It is thus logical that New Testament ethics should at first approach appear so detached from and indifferent to the provisional which still subsists and is so full of passion for the end which is coming soon.

This third opposition between the two covenants is radical and substantial and, as we shall see, carries a permanent significance. Indeed, if dogmatically we cannot know the Jesus proclaimed by the New Testament if we leave out the Christ awaited by the Old Testament, so ethically we cannot listen to the eschatological New Testament appeal without living through the historical incarnation of the Old Testament.

But let us be attentive to the major movements, at first sight paradoxical, which these two widely different periods set in motion from the ethical point of view. We are here at the often misunderstood centre of the significant duality of the two Old and New Testament social ethics.

In fact the Old Testament, since it is the time of historical duration, contains an ethic of disestablishment, of itineracy, of defensiveness against all the temptations of majority christendom. Israel is the people born of the Passover of the Paschal feast, in covenant with God in the Sinai wilderness, warned of the deadening effect of Canaan, brought in captivity to Babylon. As soon as it establishes itself in a Kingdom which is autonomous and in proportion to its duration, God overthrows it and reminds it of its vocation as a Hebrew (ivri) or wanderer. The institutions of the whole Old Testament aim at correcting accumulations which are a source of temptation, whether of power, of land, of priority of birth, or of national or religious pride. Their profound effect is not to establish but to keep on the move a society which aspires to transform Canaan into a new Egypt, tranquillizing and enslaving. Israel does not live in his own home, in the land of his personal conquest, but with God in the land given through the grace of the liberator. "You are strangers and sojourners with me". (Lev. 25:23) This is why the Old Testament theocracy always has revolutionary tones. It attacks slavery as only those do who still remember that they have been slaves themselves. It is not necessary to resort to the later prophetic traditions to find this tone. The ancient historic traditions equally contain it, those which describe the wanderings of the patriarchs: Abraham, dispossessed by Lot, Isaac coming late after Israel, Jacob, despoiled by Lahab, fearful in the presence of Esau, astonished at the deliverance from the Red Sea and celebrating David rescued in his troubles. It is the whole Old Testament, its historic side turned towards the memory of Exodus and its prophetic side turned towards the Messianic expectations of the New Creation, which uproots society from all sacralized conservatism.

The New Testament in fact presents us with a precisely opposite social ethic. In the phase of imminent eschatology it upholds adherence to and respect for the already established authorities. It warns against the temptations of a minority pietism. It turns man towards daily work, to tolerance towards his neighbour, towards the acceptance of institutions and to intercession on their behalf. It secures the believer who is always tempted to project himself into the beyond. In this sense it is conservative, but in the name of this ethical paradox which from eschatology deduces insertion into the human universal. Examples would abound to attest that this perspective is that of the whole New Testament and not only of some Pauline exhortations to citizens, slaves, women, or children. It is even true that it is on this essential point that primitive Christianity is neither an ascetic nor an idealistic stoicism, nor as Nietzsche affirmed the "platonism of the people". Since final salvation is even approaching, as Romans 13:11-12 says "It is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed". We must attach ourselves to the specialist ministries of the Church (Romans 12:3-8) to the diversified love of our neighbour (12:9-21) to the characteristic multiple functions of the impersonality of political power (13:1-7). Hence the constant reminder of human universality in the midst of which, with which and for which the Christian community exists (the "all men" of 1 Tim. 2:1, 4; Titus 3:4; 1 Peter 2:17, etc.) The New Testament distinction between the sect and the Church is not of the minority-majority order, nor institution-charisma but rather thought of, or neglect of, human universality on the double, soteriological and political plane. We must attach ourselves to the present stay in the situation (1 Cor. 7:6) adhere to the institutional, to the universal, indeed to the social "conventions", simply because they are the present reality in which to live and bear witness to eschatological faith. The New Testament as a whole is an ethical exhortation to memberships of or, we might even say, insertion into, social conservatism.

If this is a true view, the Bible contains two types of social ethic opposed neither in their content of grace nor in the invisibility of faith, but in respect of the characteristic stage of the church-world relationship. The Old Testament is revolutionary within an established Christendom. Its prophecy is especially that of opposition. In contrast the New Testament exhorts a separated and suspected minority to insert itself into the universality of the world. Its apostolicity is mainly of submission.

I think that these two types of relationship have a permanent value for the Christian social ethic, since the discernment of circumstances, that is the reality of the relationships between the Christian community and the world which surrounds it, is essential to proclaim not a moral system of untemporal principles but an exhortation suited to concrete existence.

III. The possible importance for our time of this duality of the social ethic in the Bible

It is certain that every attempt to discern the politico-social phase as prior to the choice of the corresponding biblical ethic, is singularly hazardous. Do we not hereby run the risk of making the authority of scripture depend upon an evaluation which is cultural and subjective? I shall not diminish the risks of this attempt if I confess the name of the man who has incited me to these researches and who could hardly expect to pass as a Father of the Church (even if this evangelical academy of Oud Poelgeest was in former times one of his places of refuge!): Spinoza. In his "Treatise on theological and political authorities" at the beginning of chapter VII entitled "Of the interpretation of Scripture" he writes à propos of the non-violence recommended by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount: "It appears very clearly that following only the principles of Scripture itself this teaching given by Christ and Jeremiash, that is the acceptance of injustice and non-resistance to impiety, applies only when justice is despised and in times of oppression, not in a healthy state; the exact opposite holds in a healthy state where justice is safeguarded and everyone is bound, if he wishes to show himself to be just to ask the judge for punishment of the injustice suffered by him (Lev. 5:1) and that not from vengeance (Lev. 19: 17-18) but from the desire to defend justice and the law of the land and so that the wicked may not gain an advantage from evil. All this is in entire agreement with natural reason". (p. 775 French Pleiade edition).

A harmonization like this of the Bible contradictions purely by the light of reason cannot be upheld. It lacks the christological and spiritual motivations. On the other hand what is right is the consideration of the moment of the exhortation and the why of it. To the churches of the majority and established type the Old Testament must bring the revolutionary ferment, whereas on the contrary it has traditionally sanctioned their conservatism, whether theocratic, patriarchal, feudal, bourgeois or technical. It must teach them a morality of conviction, such as Max Weber contrasts with the morality of responsibility, a morality which entails the necessary and realisable revolutions in proportion as the holders of the established power are or say they are led by the Christian norm.

On the other hand, to the churches of the minority type, suspected and sometimes persecuted, the New Testament must teach social insertion, whereas usually it has encouraged them in their pietistic and individualist evasion, in their aloofness from the world whether for eschatological or ascetic reasons. It must teach them a morality of responsibility, where they would be tempted by a morality of conviction, harmless in so far as it has no grip upon social reality, since the powers that be are not in the least concerned for the word of the Church.

We know that history usually offers us a very different picture: the régimes of christendom are strengthened in their conservatism by the Old Testament and the minority régimes are confirmed in their piety by the New. In this it seems to me that both truly observe a duality of social ethic in the Bible but miss the deep significance, the exhortation which is only apparently paradoxical,

whereas fundamentally it meets every man's true need. The established churches are stifled by confusing the social order with the will of God and the churches of professing Christians are stifled by deserting the social order in favour of a disincarnate order of God. That a powerful Christendom (Christian community) should be conservative, and that only when it becomes a minority it should become revolutionary, is neither interesting nor biblical. It is in both cases the opposite paradox, lived in the name of faith, which would be meaningful for the world. André Gide declared that "one must follow this current but upstream". Let the majority groups then live out their conviction but the minority groups hold to responsibility. Perhaps the greatest difficulty for the world to believe through the Church is to be found not in the disunion of the churches nor in the necessity for certain violations, but in this all too human spectacle of a church which is conservative in the good days and pietistic in the bad, whereas the force of prophetic witness was that it cried out against injustice in the days of opulence and the power of the apostolic witness is that it calls men to patient conformity in the world in the time of persecution.

These two ethics seem to me to have permenent value, for our churches know no identical situations either in time or in space. Now we must hear the particular exhortation which everyone needs, in its time and in its place. Social ethic means an ethic for <u>my</u> Church and <u>my</u> society.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORICAL EVENTS FOR ETHICAL DECISIONS

By

J. M. Lochmann

The question of the impotance of historical events for our ethical and political decisions is one of the most urgent and most discussed problems of theology today. For all of us world history has become an almost inevitable destiny. Of course it is true that in the past also people were bound by the conditions of their time and conditioned by history. That is one of the conditions of human life at any time: no one chooses the time and place in which his life will be passed. He enters a situation which is already to a large extent already ordered. We are members of a certain race, a certain nation, a certain class, a certain Church. We inherit the rich heritage of our forefathers - but also their sin and their guilt.

Today, however, this general situation has become far more acute. Never before has human life been woven into such an intricute web of world events. In former times people could live within the comparatively narrow limits of their tribe, their town, their country, which were only seldom directly affected by the events of world history. Today this is no longer possible. During the second half of the 20th century it has become absolutely clear that "everything is connected with everything else". An explosion on the other side of the globe which would not have concerned us at all 50 years ago now has direct repercussions on our own lives. This is particularly clear in relation to the question of peace and war: on this planet we are all in the same boat. It may even be said: for thousands of years the first problem facing mankind has been how to control Nature. Today our first problem is history, and how to control the future history of mankind. The question of the significance of historical events for our decisions is therefore extremely urgent.

And theologians today disagree about this problem. Let us try to indicate the field of discussion, pointing out two typical possibilities.

I.

1. A realisation of the decisive power of history over our lives may at first stimulate attempts to formulate a philosophy of history or a theology of history. That may be the classic opportunity for theological thinking about history. It was the Bible (especially the prophets of the Old Testament) which first showed mankind that the stage of world history is the decisive scene where our decisions have to be taken. Nearly all the religions of antiquity were directed towards nature-mythology; the philosophy of antiquity was strongly metaphysical and transcendental in its orientation, seeking truth, meaning and reality beyond time and history. But the prophets and the Apostles emphatically

draw attention to this world and its history as the sphere in which God deals with His people, in which He brings forth Jesus Christ as His ultimate act of salvation, and in which He will maintain His loyalty until the end of history.

Of course, the Bible does not work out an abstract, general philosophy of history. It has little interest in the course of world history as such. Its whole attention is concentrated upon the history of the Covenant - the history of salvation. But the light of this history - which takes place within world history and which ultimately means the salvation of the nations, of the human race - falls also upon the whole history of the world and of the nations. They too are in the hand of the One God; the Cross stands above them too; God's ultimate purpose is also their purpose. So the message of the Bible always provides a stimulus to examine the course and the meaning of history - including those aspects where the strict concentration upon the "Heilsgeschichte" has become generalised and secularised. The biblical background can be clearly traced in all the past philosophies of history - including those which are deliberately non-Christian.

The great time for philosophy of history, both in the Church and in the world, was probably the 19th century. Schleiermacher, the great father of 19th century Protestant theology, already called theology and the Church to do so: "History is...the loftiest object of religion; religion begins with history and ends with history" (Addresses on Religion, 2nd Address). History is "the profoundest, most universal revelation" of which is deepest and holiest. And the greatest thinkers of the 19th century - Hegel and Marx - were also the greatest philosophers of history. Hegel regarded it as sheer lack of faith if the Church did not venture upon a philosophy of history, for "Christians are initiated into God's mysteries, and this gives us also the key to world history" (Vernunft in der Geschichte, ed. Hoffmeister, p.46). So these attempts were ventured upon, both in the Church and in the world. Many people, who lost their faith in the Christian "Heilsgeschichte", retained their faith in history as the ultimate religion. (1)

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(1) E.G. Burckhardt, Dilthey, Croce and Troeltsch. See K. Löwith: p.176 f: "The modern over-appreciation of history, and of "the world" as "history", is the outcome of our estrangement from the natural theology of antiquity, and from the supernatural theology of Christianity." "Faith in the absolute relevance of history, which has made the books of Spengler and Toynbee best-sellers, has been brought about by the emancipation of the modern view of history from its original limitation by classical cosmology and by Christian theology."

Through the terrible catastrophes of the two world wars this faith was shattered during the 20th century - and so were other types of philosophy of history such as the American Social Gospel with its faith in the progressive attainment of the Kingdom of God through the democratic ordering of modern society. Nevertheless, despite all these blows, the philosophy of history is far from dead. In Germany, theology is usually hyper-sensitive about any trace (real or suspected) of an idea of a philosophy of history - a fact which is a weakness rather than a strength in its theology. But even in Germany, some of the younger theologians have recently been trying to revive the 19th century traditions of a philosophy of history, and to carry it further - even as far as the somewhat ambiguous slogans about "the Revelation as history" (Wolfhart Pannenberg and his friends).

2. In opposition to the old and the new philosophy of history and theology of history, the 20th century has produced an increasingly strong tendency to "mistrust history". This mistrust does not spring only from the destruction of faith in the great philosophies of history, owing to the shattering events of our time. It springs also (and that is its strength) from a protest against the "wearier" forms of "confidence in history", especially against relativistic historicism, which regarded the truth merely as a predicate of changing history. It sprang also from despair, and that is perhaps its weakness; despair about the course of contemporary history. This type of theological view of the events of history assumes many different forms. It would be worthwhile, for instance, to describe the ideas of Danek, an outstanding Old Testament theologian in Czechoslovakia, against the background of Czech theology. But I will confine myself to the form (of despair) which has had the most influence: the theology of Rudolf Bultmann.

Bultmann's philosophy of history is based on the work of Martin Heidegger. According to him, the nature of history is "Geschichtlichkeit". The whole attention of this philosophy is concentrated upon this "nature" of history, i.e. upon my "Geschichtlichkeit" as "Wesensverfassung" of existence - not upon history as a process of personal and collective events. Finally Heidegger pronounces this history to be "the commonplaces of external history", and our involvement with it as a failure to perceive its real nature, forgetting what we really are and concentrating our attention on "the commonplaces of Mr. Everyman". The question of the events of world history is a false flight from death. The history of philosophy is therefore the arch-lie: "All history calculates what the future will be like, on the basis of certain views of the past. History is the constant destruction of the future and of the relation of history to the impact of destiny". ("Holzwege" *, p.301)

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* "Holzwege" - "false tracks"

The ideas of Rudolf Bultmann follow the same lines. He too starts with the nature of history, which he finds in the "Geschichtlichkeit" of human nature - human temporality. Man always lives in the future; his real life is always before him; he is "always on the way to what he wants to be". The essential thing is always to attain the real nature of that future, and not to miss it. That is the meaning of human history, and the meaning of history altogether. For ultimately there is no real history beyond this "Geschichtlichkeit" of mine. Our thought and our action must therefore be concentrated upon that - solely upon that. "The man who complains that he cannot see any meaning in history, and that his own life therefore has no meaning either because it is interwoven with history" must be roused. He must be told: "Don't look around you at the history of the world; look into your own personal history. The meaning of history is always present with you; you cannot look at it as a spectator; you can only see it by taking responsible decisions. Every moment contains the dormant possibility of being the eschatological moment. You must awaken it." ("Geschichte und Eschatologie", p. 181).

Bultmann argues as a theologian, and his view of history is expressed as a Christian, eschatological view. He must therefore work the biblical motives into his own concept - especially the prophetic view which regards the events of history also as signs of God's judgment and of His mercy. How can he do this? Bultmann takes his stand on the thesis that a sublimation of the prophets' theology of history into existential "Geschichtlichkeit" corresponds to the message of the Bible itself, on all essential points. It is true, the prophets regarded history as the scene of God's concrete action. But this belief was soon sublimated (in apocalyptic thought) into mythology and metaphysics; apocalypticism was then still further removed from this world; and this opened up a way for us - the way to the existential interpretation. Bultmann insists on this existentialisation. My own existence is the only point to which our decisions in history are related: "In the decision of faith I decide not for a responsible action, but for a new understanding of myself as a man freed from himself by God's grace and given back to himself anew, in order to live by the grace of God." ("Geschichte und Eschatologie", p. 191). The history of the world does not concern the Christian at all - at any rate not directly. This applies already to the work of Christ: "The coming of Christ is an event in the Kingdom of Eternity, which is incommensurable in relation to historical time." It applies also to our own life and action: "In his faith the Christian is a contemporary of Christ; time and world-history are superseded." ("Geschichte und Eschatologie", p. 182).

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If we try to apply the results of our comparison between the two different Christian concepts of history to our question ("The Significance of historical events for ethical decisions"), we arrive at two different answers. In fact they are diametrically opposed. The "philosophy of history" concept regards the events of history as supremely important in relation to ethical decisions. This applies especially to the "heilsgeschichtlich" form of this philosophy:

if history is really "Heilsgeschichte" then it is absolutely crucial to recognise the KAIROS of history and to seize it - for a genuine decision can be taken only in relation to this KAIROS, recognising truly the "logic of history" and actively adapting itself to the necessity of history. "Volentem fata ducunt, nolentem trahunt" - tertium non datur. ("The fates carry us along, whether we will or not; there is no third course"). For our own action, therefore, it is essential to decipher the signs of the times. It is they which decide even what is "good" and what is "bad" - for what is good is what corresponds with the course of history. But the historical situation is also ethically decisive for the "tireder" forms of philosophy of history: if truth is a predicate of history, and if history is the beginning and the end, then the course of history is our final hope and our final point of relation: we must act in accordance with history. So the philosophy of history takes the events of history very seriously.

It is quite different when history is existentially transformed into "Geschichtlichkeit". This regards the events of history as quite unimportant. They are a sea of chaos, and it really is not worthwhile to take too much interest in them. The only thing which may therefore be profitable for our ethical decisions may be an attempt to perceive a new meaning in the processes of history, "as long as the pressure and the conflicts continue, under which the Christian has to purify his soul." So it is quite logical if Bultmann regards it as one of the two main temptations of the Protestant Church today, that it is clearly and concretely taking political action in contemporary history. It is true, the Christian has a political responsibility - but it concerns not so much his faith as his reason and his personal judgment. "It is the duty of theology and of the Church to point out his responsibility in its preaching. But it is not the task of theology and of the Church "to draw up political rules and thus relieve the individual of responsibility for his own decisions." ("Glauben und Verstehen", III, p. 196). Our decisions of faith have nothing to do directly with the events of history. It is characteristic of Bultmann that he regards the course of world history as somewhat disastrous and catastrophic. Faced by the events of contemporary history "men and women realise not only their dependence on those events, but also their own helplessness. They feel that they are not only involved in the history of the world, but that they are at its mercy. There is particular bitterness in this feeling today...."Our actions are obstacles to our lives, just as much as our sufferings are" ("Geschichte und Eschatologie", p. 2f). There is a certain nostalgia in this concept of history.

Both views of history are put forward as "Christian". The second view is a warning, not to base our ethical decisions on <u>one</u> of these views alone. They are a Scylla and Charybdis between which we must steer our course; both fall short of the biblical view.

We realise their shortcomings if we compare them with the main emphases of the Bible's message. The biblical view of history seems to me to be marked by two perceptions, which may be summed up in the pregnant phrase: "hominum confusione et Dei providentia historia regitur" ("history is governed by human confusion and by divine providence"). (For the biblical-theological basis for this view of world history I should like to draw attention especially to what Karl Barth writes in "Kirchliche Dogmatik" IV. 3, pp.784-825). Both must be taken seriously: the Bible is well acquainted with "human confusion", with history as the sphere of human freedom and human guilt. But in defiance of all this confusion the Bible attests its firm faith in the omnipotence of God - even in history. God has not abandoned history. This is a statement of faith - not a principle of one's own philosophy of history. But as a statement of faith it is the power of the Christian life. So the Christian lives in history. He regards human confusion quite soberly. He believes quite soberly in God's providence. "We are living just before the Last Days - we believe in the Ultimate" - this phrase taken from Bonhoefeer's "Ethik" applies also to our decisions in face of history.

Both the view of history mentioned fall short of this biblical view. The philosophy of history certainly understands something about human confusion; but is it not in danger of under-estimating it, and thus impairing the boundary between the Ultimate and the Time-just-before-the-Last-Days? The existential view of history certainly understands about God's providence; but is it not in danger of separating it (as "the Ultimate") completely from our human history, thus leaving us in despair? The two things are inseparable. In my own view, it is only against this background that the question of the significance of historical events for our ethical and political decisions can be given a proper theological basis. How can we now answer this question, concretely and positively?

II.

Our view of history as a sphere as one of the spheres "ruled by divine providence and by human confusion" seems to me to lead to important consequences for our theme - consequences which are of central importance for our basic ethical attitude in face of history. (1)

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(1) In my opinion this view of history is also of importance for other questions, e.g. are these decisions concerned with matters of faith, or are they merely questions of judgment? As is well known, this question is one of those most debated by theologians today. If one bears in mind the two different concepts of history, it is fairly clear what the answer will be in this case also. A philosophy of history regards decision in face of history as a matter of faith; if history is a divine revelation (direct or indirect) it calls for a corresponding attitude - an attitude of faith. According to the existential concept, however, history is a factor which is irrelevant to

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(Footnote continued) theology, and our attitude to the events of history is a question of judgment. Ultimately faith has nothing to do with history. In the secular sphere of history faith can at most emphasise our responsibility in principle, but it cannot give concrete guidance. That is only in the power of reason and judgment. According to the concept of history indicated, both answers seem to me inadequate. If history is a sphere of "human confusion", then the events of history must really be considered with extreme soberness. We must not be too hasty in proclaiming "judgments of faith" in the confusion of human quarrels; we must not be too ready to "preach", where the immediate need is to have a clear grasp of the facts. Most important of all, we must not claim that our own limited view is "the Christian view" and make our political differences into religious or metaphysical fronts. Our views must not assume the character of a "last judgment"; our quarrels must not be carried on as if they were crusades. There is constant justification here for Bultmann's concern in emphasising the sober, logical, reflective aspect of our views of history. But in my opinion this concern is made into an absolute, and this is not justifiable. Of course, we are living in the Days-before-the-End and should think and argue accordingly (i.e. logically). But we believe in the Ultimate; amid all the relativities of historical events, amid all logical considerations, our faith is not dumb. It is also concerned in all soberness with problems of faith and with decisions of faith. Wherever we encounter man, there faith must speak. This does not mean that logic is simply excluded. In this respect it is not a choice of "either faith or logic"; nor is it a question of choosing between "human confusion" and "divine providence". On the contrary: faith calls for <u>logical thought</u>; but it is <u>faith</u> which calls. Faith is not neutral, it is "partial"; following in the steps of Jesus, faith takes sides with man, and appeals to reason to seek in this direction. So our ethical decisions in face of history must not be understood "enthusiastically" as bare decisions of faith, nor dualistically as bare questions of judgment; they must be understood in the unity of the obedient life which tries to act in faith and in the light of reason (without separating them).

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If history stands under God's providence - or to express it in clearer theological terms, if history is the place where Jesus Christ accepted our human lot in complete solidarity, in which he became our contemporary in history, and "dwelt among us" (John 1: 14) - then it must be taken with great seriousness also because it is our place.

Our place in history is not a matter of chance, it is not an Adiaforon, it is not a side-stage imposing no responsibility upon us, and which we can change at will. It is our "unique opportunity" entrusted to us here and now. We have no other. And it is also the scene of our vocation - the actual scene of our concrete responsibility, the only one we have, in which we must either prove our mettle - or fail. All that sounds rather commonplace, but it is by no means a truism. For it is so easy to miss that opportunity, and so many people do so! Some people are always behind, they come limping after, they are always longing for the past. And others are impatient with the present time; they are already living in the dreams of their future. Both these types of people are in danger of missing the opportunities of the present - their concrete tasks, the people around them, their actual accupation. And how easy it is for people to miss the concrete opportunities of their calling; discontented with their lot, they long for a different one, and dream of other opportunities; or else they with draw into themselves and become embittered and defiant. All that is humanly understandable in certain situations. But from the Christian point of view it is not justifiable. "It is here, and not in any other place, that God's call must be perceived and His commandment fulfilled. Loyalty to Him requires loyalty also to one's place in life." (Karl Barth, "Kirchliche Dogmatik" III, 4, p.710).

All this applies especially to our ethical decisions. From the biblical point of view, ethics cannot exist at all apart from their historical setting, ethics cannot be divorced from time. In this respect the eschatological orientation of the New Testament should be taken very seriously, and the consequences which the Apostles deduce from it in their ethical commandments. The New Testament is not concerned with abstract principles, nor with dogmatic laws divorced from time and space; it is concerned with recognising time soberly, seizing it, "redeeming" it - and acting accordingly in the place and time appointed to us. We need only recall the eschatological Paranese of Romans 13: 11 ff.; I. Thess. 5: 1 ff, etc. ; also the "house-tables" mentioned in Eph. 5: 22ff.; Col. 3: 18 ff. etc. This eschatological orientation of the ethics of the New Testament - and the ethical orientation of the eschatology of the New Testament - applies also to our decisions when faced by the events of history. Of course, eschatology is not simply history, and history is not simply eschatology. But the light of eschatology illumines faith in history and compels us to shape it accordingly - to decipher the signs of the time, and to do what is necessary here and now. Thus the Christian ethic, because it is eschatological, is definitely related to history. It can never be sufficient simply to repeat what was demanded of people "in past times and in different places" - however well they may have responded to the challenge of that time. It is here and now that we have to fulfil the commandments of the

Living God. Faith takes that commandment seriously; and for that very reason it strives to fulfil that commandment here and now.

I should like to give an example to illustrate this importance of the historical situation for our ethical decisions: the question of war (the central theme before the Puidoux Conference). We all know the theory of the "just war", and we know that for centuries it has been the classical teaching of the Christian Church about war. But many of us have always been opposed to this teaching, which seems to us to be a distortion of God's will. There are other people, however, who have no objection to warfare in principle as applied in the past, but who clearly feel that the old categories are no longer applicable to our present historical situation, because in the atomic age the danger of atomic warfare is a complete negation of every form of justice, and because it constitutes a radical menace to the very existence of mankind. It is becoming increasingly clear that today we can no longer simply hand on the traditional, classical formulations and decisions relating to war. They are an absurd anachronism in our present situation. We must seek new ways and new formulations. And that is where the astonishing thing happens for many of us; the clear message of Jesus is illumined for us afresh - because we take the new situation seriously. It is not the historical events themselves which give his message this additional force. Nothing in history could ever do that. But Jesus' commandment, which had been watered down into abstract terms, becoems strong and powerful when we obediently apply the Gospel to actual life. This is another reason why the historical situation must be taken seriously. (1)

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(1) It is one of the important points in the theology of J.L. Hromadka that he stresses this fact. The slogan "take the historical situation seriously" has become a real "ceterum autem" of his message, especially during the last decades. In the ecumenical movement today we find hardly a single important theologian who has devoted so much thought to our position in history, and to the meaning of the tremendous changes in church and society. He is therefore criticised on account of having a boundless preference for philosophising about history, and theologising about history. When reading Hromadka one constantly comes across phrases which indicate a tendency to philosophise about history, such as "we are confronted today by a completely new era in the history of mankind", contemporary events "reflect the deep change, the turning-point which has taken place in the structure of history", "the challenge of the hour", we must examine "the dimensions-of-depth in the course of history", and so on. And if, in addition, one takes account of the fact that Hromadka is a pupil of Troeltsch, and that he is clearly influenced by his teacher in spite of being a theologian, the conclusion seems to be clear: Hromadka is a philosopher of history cloaked as a theologian.

In spite of all the apparent evidence for this, however, this conclusion seems to me to be an example of rushing to a conclusion, which is not justified. A clear distinction must be drawn. The theological fatality of a philosophy of history breaks out where one transforms history (consciously or unconsciously)

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(Footnote continued) into a religious or secular "doctrine of salvation", when one ascribes the nature of a Revelation to historical events, and then turns ones own views of history into an absolute - into religious judgments. But this is just what Hromadka does not do. He angrily rejects any attempt to interpret history as "Heilsgeschichte" or as Revelation: "It is not legitimate to regard history and its events as a source of Revelation; I will waste no words on this point." (Letter to Karl Barth, "Antwort", p.4). And he is sincere in this. His whole life-work is a protest against everything which tries to restrict the Gospel within the limits of natural factors. The Gospel is free - and it liberates. This great certainty shines out of all Hromadka's writings - and not only out of them but out of his whole life. So it frees us too from history - and of course from all forms of philosophy about history, which are always tempted to weave the Christian Gospel into their theories. But the Gospel, the Message of Jesus of Nazareth, the Word incarnate of God, "liberates us from history within history, just as it liberates us from death and the grave." ("Kirchliche Existenz in der heutigen Situation", symposium "Kirche und Verkündigung", p.15).

The fact that the Christian Gospel is free from history, but at the same time within history and for history, is perhaps the very heart of Hromadka's theology. It is clearly rooted in Christology, in "the Message of the way to man" (as he has called his "kleine Dogmatik"). Hromadka says that we must obediently occupy the place which the Son of God has occupied for us. He entered earthly history to the full; he therefore cannot be related only to our religious life beyond history, its purification and spiritualisation; he must be sought in the middle and in the depth of the reality of history. That is the ultimate meaning of Hromadka's concept of history: the reality (actuality) of following Christ. "My concern is to show that the Church of Jesus Christ and its theologians must face history courageously, and must grapple with contemporary realities in all their naked pitilessness. And the purpose of this is not to adapt oneself to history and its changes, for any reason whatever, or to mould theological thought in accordance with history; its purpose is to attain real theological control of any historical situation." ("Antwort", p.4). And this concern - to take history seriously for the sake of the way of Jesus Christ - must be whole-heartedly approved. So Hromadka is not a philosopher of history in the cloak of a theologian; he is a genuine theologian - though he perhaps sometimes dons the cloak of a philosopher of history.

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Although faith takes the events of history seriously, it does not take them "with deadly seriousness". For history is also the sphere of "human confusion", and should not on any account be taken with deadly seriousness. Both facts are stressed in our slogan: history is a human activity, not the work of daemons; the power of history is not the power of God nor the power of the devil. It must not be regarded either as divine or as devilish. And history is the outcome of human confusions; it is not entirely sublime, venerable or holy. We need not be bewitched or dazzled by the course of history. Of course, it does bewitch and dazzle us, filling us either with "enthusiastic" optimism or with sceptical defeatism. (Both the concepts of history that we have mentioned may perhaps bear some traces of this). But there is no biblical justification for this attitude. The events of history must be evaluated soberly and realistically.

In concrete terms this means: that no historical position must be raised to an absolute. This is true already of our own lives. We are not the prisoners of history, and we must not live as if we were. Our situation in history is the base from which we act. We cannot take action from any other position; but we do take action from it, i.e. we are not simply dominated by it. Karl Barth has expressed this in a very apt way; he says,"we must not regard our position in history as our grave, but as our cradle" (see Karl Barth, "Kirchliche Dogmatik" IV, 3, p. 714). Our position is not equivalent to our completed vocation; it is a preparation for that vocation. This vocation (the call of the Christian Gospel) illumines our history - not vice versa. In this light we recognize our "cradle" as a gift and gratefully accept it - but at the same time we realise that it is a task, a point of departure for a life of faith. So the eschatological call first shows us our concrete place in history, and then calls us to move forward from that place - not in order to leave it empty (in the general-abstract, cosmopolitan sense) but in order to fill it with the Message of Christ. It is the place where we prove ourselves, the place where we make our witness; it is not to be accepted passively, but to be moulded actively. So the Gospel teaches us to take a positive attitude to our position in history (but not "positivistically"), in Christian solidarity, not in "vergesetzlichter Selbstidentifizierung" (legalistic self-identification?)

Our position in history must not be turned into an Absolute in its relation to our own lives, and even less in relation to the lives of others. This is a constant temptation: to judge others by one's own standards. In a certain sense it is "natural"; we cannot help thinking and acting from our own point of view. This "bias" is inevitable when thinking about history, and acting in it. But this situation must be soberly realised; we must not "hypostasieren"; we must be ready for genuine encounter and conversation with people in different situations. Otherwise our own view becomes a norm, if we do not remember our own "human confusion"; history becomes de-humanised; the sphere of human decisions develops into a battle-ground for daemons; for whenever I turn my personal view into an absolute norm, the other person will do the same.

It is of particular practical importance to recognise this today; it is a particularly acute point of our ethical responsibility in the contemporary world. We are living in the age of the Cold War in a world in which every conceivable means are enlisted (except nuclear warfare which would mean universal suicide) to fight our opponents. It is an age full of divisions and tensions. In this situation even the Christian Church is tempted to adopt the strategy of the Cold War. Especially in view of the fact that one of the two blocs is deliberately and openly based on a non-Christian ideology, the other side is in danger of identifying its own policy with Christianity itself (it is not by chance that many of the leading parties in Western Europe call themsleves "Christian") and of regarding its political struggle as a Christian crusade against anti-Christians. This intensifies the spirit of the Cold War - for it is precisely in the religious categories that one's opponent is easily stamped as an adversary of God (i.e. daemonised). This is clearly a danger to the spirit of understanding; one cannot negotiate with daemons. The difficult, but hopeful, way of negotiation and effort is defamed from the outset as an illusion. Christians must try to counter this tendency. In the world of "human confusion" the struggles are not between angels and daemons; they are human tensions. That does not mean that they are innocuous; they go very deep. But they certainly must not be regarded as insuperable. For they are just human tensions. The task of Christian theology is soberly to develop this view of history, and the Christian churches have the special task of expressing this view in their ecumenical contacts and in their efforts for peace in the divided world. By being clear and concrete in our thinking, without concealing the differences between us (realising the human relativity of our views, in the light of the Gospel) we shall not only prove that our ecumenical contacts are genuine; we shall also set up a sign of hope for our fellow-men. This is a very practical way in which to express our theological reflections concerning the significance of historical events for ethical decisions.

THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF THE TEACHING OF THE EARLY CHURCH

By

Hans-Werner Bartsch

We are accustomed to speak of Paränese*, and hence of ethical guidance, only when the Christian Church has consolidated itself within society, and is endeavouring to maintain its existence as a factor in the world. We therefore regard Paränese as a collection of ethical instructions given with the purpose of making the Christian Church a respectable body in society. For the Gospels we usually take the preaching of the Early Church as our point of departure; but this is not the same in the case of the Paränese which is rather regarded as something supplementary, something secondary. Its "Sitz im Leben" is not preaching, but the instruction of the congregation. Within the Gospels, however, there is a criterion which may destroy this view. We regard as "instruction of the congregation" all those sayings of Jesus which were addressed to his disciples; whereas we find missionary preaching in Jesus' preaching to the people.

This distinction has proved very apt. It shows that the Sermon on the Mount is "instruction of the congregation", catechism for the first Christians; but does the same apply to Jesus' "teaching in the plain" recorded in Luke 6: 20-49? It seems at first sight as if Luke were describing the same situation as Matthew. Luke 6: 20 begins: "And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples..." But this is only a brief introductory sentence, which relates solely to the Beatitudes. In 6: 27 a new element is introduced: "But I say unto you..." is addressed to an audience. And 6: 39 opens with a similar introductory sentence. The actual situation in which the "teaching in the plain" was given is therefore not shown by 6:20, which merely refers to the situation described before, and introduces nothing new. The scene of the "teaching in the plain" is described in 6: 17-19. Contrary to Matthew 5: 1 f., Luke draws a clear distinction between the "teaching in the plain", and Jesus' going up into a mountain with his disciples. According to Luke, Jesus "came down with them and stood in the plain" - the place for a missionary sermon.

The "situation" of the "teaching in the plain" gives us a collection of maxims (as we know them within the Paränese), in the form of missionary teaching. And as missionary teaching is in any case the starting point of the Early Christian tradition, we may legitimately take for the "Paränese" the same point of departure as for the other tradition of the Gospels. However, we shall have to try out this working hypothesis to see whether it is true, by an interpretation of the teaching given by Jesus "in the plain".

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* exhortation

1.

The Beatitudes included in the teaching "on the plain" have been interpreted as secondary, on account of the direct form of address not otherwise found in Beatitudes, and different from the account given by Matthew. Within the setting of a missionary sermon, however, these Beatitudes are revealed as the original, pre-literary form of the Beatitudes recounted by Matthew. They promise the listener salvation, without restriction, just because he is a poor man with nothing on which he can build his life, and is therefore open to the salvation offered to him in Jesus. Originally there may have been only three of them; the fourth may be an addition based on the position of the Church. These three Beatitudes speak of the lack of any basis for life, whereby man could understand himself. In the affirmations of the Sermon on the Mount, through extension, the direct promise of salvation has been developed into a statement of the conditions for that salvation.

The cries of "Woe unto you!" are given by way of contrast, on analogy with the Beatitudes, each being placed in direct opposition to one of the Beatitudes. But it would be a mistake to assume that they were added by Luke, or by his source. We find the same contrast in the Gospels, especially in the other material of the Gospels. Jesus' power to perform miracles is contrasted with the power of the devils; faith is contrasted with the disciples' failure to understand. By this the audience are told to rejoice because they need not fear the power of the devils, and they need not be like the disciples who could not understand. The cries of "Woe unto you!" say the same thing: rejoice! you need not understand yourself in terms of what you possess, and perish with it; for you now receive the promise of salvation which forms the basis of your life here on earth, and of your eternal salvation; for this basis is not part of the transience of this life: it is the Lord who holds your life in His hand.

If the beginning of the "teaching in the plain" may be understood in this way as "preaching", we may go on to ask whether the admonitions which follow maintain the same situation, and especially what social implications spring from the fact that the admonitions are rooted in this particular sermon.

2.

The first of the admonitions - the development of the commandment to love one's enemies (Luke 6: 27-35) - is broader than the parallel passage in Matthew (5: 39-48). But in Luke no reference is made to the Law, whereas Matthew brings out the distinction between the old Law and the new one. This omission of any reference to the Law seems to be characteristic of the whole "sermon in the plain", which is not concerned with the better fulfilment of the Law (Matt. 5: 20). Whereas Matthew stresses that Jesus came in order to fulfil the Law (Matt. 5: 17), Luke does not refer to this at all. The admonitions of the "sermon in the plain" are therefore not to be understood primarily as the fulfilment of the Law - not even as the better fulfilment of it. The question then arises, how are they then to be understood?

The commandment to love one's enemies is developed in two parallel series of axioms, between which is interposed the Golden Rule. The first series is older than Matthew, as is proved by the fact that there is no reference to the position of the Church ("pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you", Matt. 5: 44). The admonitions are expressed more broadly, with no special antithesis in mind which could determine the understanding of the listener. But the admonitions are also sharper. Luke makes no reference to a lawsuit about a coat (Matt. 6: 40) but speaks about taking the coat. And the tone is sharper in Luke's version: "Give to every man that asketh of thee!" Again, there is no mention of borrowing; Christians are admonished not to ask for anything back which is taken away from them!

The second series of admonitions demand conduct which transcends the normal conduct required by the Law. This is most clearly expressed in connection with treatment of one's neighbour: lend, and don't expect to get any of your goods returned! This same admonition is found in another form in Matt. 5: 42: "from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away!" Thus the Sermon on the Mount is set in relation to the demands of the Law, it calls for the highest fulfilment of the Law, extolled by the Rabbinic teaching based on Psalm 15: 5: "he does not put out his money at interest, and does not take a bribe against the innocent". In the Sermon on the Mount these admonitions are all summed up in the words: "Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

On the other hand in the "sermon on the plain" the second series of admonitions are contrasted with the piety that is based on the Law. The purpose of such conduct is not to be perfect like God, but to prove oneself to be children of the Highest in His mercy to "the unthankful and the evil" (Luke 6: 35). Here we have the real motive of Luke's admonitions: we are to prove that we are children of God, as exhorted by Jesus. If man treats his neighbour as God will treat him on the Day of Judgment (as Jesus said), he proves that he has accepted Jesus' message; at the same time he is passing that message on. God's mercy in judgment (of which Jesus assures his hearers) is the norm for the admonitions.

The difference between this and the Sermon on the Mount is shown in the second parallel to the closing words in Matt. 5: 45... "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." God's behaviour in the world is the norm for Christian behaviour. So in this world Christians must prove that they are children of God. On the other hand the "sermon on the plain" (reported by Luke) is not interested in proving anything in the world, but in bearing witness of salvation to one's neighbour.

In this connection the "Golden Rule" presents a problem. It is inserted between the two series of admonitions, clearly in order to sum up the first series and bring them to a close. Thus a logion is given as a summary of the commandment which was widely known, both in its negative and its positive form, and which (corresponding to the Rabbinic version in Matt. 7: 12) appears as the summing up of "the Law and the prophets."

Its insertion can be explained by the nalogous construction, and in view of such considerations of form this may in fact be regarded as the first step towards expanding the admonitions into the "Sermon on the Mount". One is struck, however, by the inadequacy of the "Golden Rule" as a norm for behaviour: "Love, that ye may be loved in return. Lend, that ye may borrow!" So in this context the "Golden Rule" is really a foreign element; its original purpose can only have been to form a line of demarcation. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time: all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them!" But I say unto you: love without expecting to be loved in return! Lend, without expecting others to lend to you!"

This is followed by the injunction not to judge others, but to forgive them, as God forgives us. It is implemented by familiar comparisons resembling proverbs, and culminates with the injuction not to assume that salvation is obtained merely by calling "Lord, lord!" but to carry out the commandment to love and forgive in actual practice. Here again the passage differs from the Sermon on the Mount.

3.

We will now examine the social aspect of these admonitions, which are all instructions to pass on the message of salvation through action which is in itself a form of preaching: the message of salvation is to be passed on to our neighbour by showing him forgiving love. What relation has this concept of concrete action to the position of the Christian in a non-Christian society? The point is not that the Christian should "prove his mettle" in society by fulfilling the Law better. Nor is it a question of a nova lex being given to the Christian to guide his conduct. The situation is rather that by accepting the message of salvation the Christian has the possibility for a devotion which is not envisaged in the Law at all, because unlimited devotion is impossible from the point of view of this world.

We cannot help interpreting this from the angle of the generally-accepted concept of life, which is also the angle on which the Law is based, because it is only from this angle that the impossibility of such conduct, and the new possibility, become comprehensible. Within this world - also under the Law - man understands his own existence from the angle of his own possibilities. He has nothing else upon which he can base his existence or understand it. This fact is not altered in any way by faith in the God who created him, in so far as that faith is based on what man sees and understands: that God makes the

sun to shine, and the rain to fall, upon the just and the unjust alike. Man has at his disposal what this action of God's brings to him. He also has at his disposal the action of his neighbour, in so far as he can determine it - as the Golden Rule says, both in its negative and in its positive form. For the Coming Judgment he has "at his disposal" his own blameless conduct as contrasted with the conduct of his neighbour, which is to be judged. And just because man knows that his own conduct is far from blameless he is bound to contrast it with that of his neighbour, which is far worse. Ordinary love which expects to be loved in return, and ordinary justice, are therefore merely conduct based on one's understanding of one's own life, in the light of the means "at one's disposal". In regard to man's behaviour in society, such conduct reflects that it is ultimately based on the Ego, even when the conduct is blameless.

The "sermon in the plain" is a message of unrestricted salvation, irrespective of what man has "at his disposal". The Christian Church has received this message through its encounter with the Risen Christ; for this encounter was a testimony that God came to save those who were lost. The Church now passed on this message in its own preaching. But because this message was given not only through Jesus' words, but also through his death and resurrection, the only way in which the Church can effectively pass on this message in history is through action. Transmitting the news of salvation is not merely an additional commitment (taking second place after the receiving of salvation); salvation is received only by passing on the message through action. If the Church is really the Church of Jesus Christ, therefore, it has a duty to its neighbour. Its relation to society springs from its responsibility to bear testimoney, because this responsibility is bound to include action in relation to the neighbour.

For the Christian his neighbour is not merely an object whom he uses to demonstrate a new form of conduct derived from his faith, thus fulfilling a nova lex. His neighbour is the person to whom he passes on the message of salvation through action - in order that he himself may thereby receive salvation. Christian conduct therefore consists in carrying out the salvation received. The gift of salvation opens up a new understanding of life, based on God's act in Jesus Christ. By his way of life, by his devotion to his neighbour, the Christian bears witness that he has accepted this message for himself. The "sermon in the plain" explains this devotion as loving one's enemies in this world, and not passing judgment on their life hereafter.

My attitude to my neighbour in society must therefore always be: am I bearing witness of my new understanding of my own life, in my relation to him? It is through expressing (or failing to express) this new understanding that I show whether I have accepted salvation or not. My conduct within the community (my social behaviour) therefore always reflects my concept of life - whether I think my life is my own to dispose of, or whether it is determined by the salvation bestowed upon me, and which I can accept only by passing it on to my neighbour.

When deciding what the exhortations say about social conduct, the norm will always be: does my conduct transmit the salvation bestowed upon me? Thus an attitude based on the Law, which misinterprets these admonitions, must be condemned, because such an attitude is based on "what one possesses".

It is true, my attempt at an explanation over-emphasises certain aspects of the Sermon on the Mount (the first product of the Early Church's attempts at exhortation) in a way which might appear deprecatory. My intention was, however, to show that if these exhortations are interpreted in the light of the Church's consolidation in the world, this means reverting to the Law, thus missing the true approach to a new concept of life. The Sermon on the Mount must rather be understood in terms of the exhortation practised in the Early Church, and this gives it social relevance. My neighbour, who lives side by side with me in society, is not only the person to whom I must pass on the message; he thereby enables me to accept salvation myself.

The gift of salvation becomes a reality in history when its acceptance is reflected in my new attitude to my neighbour - but never in a personal act of faith resulting in new behaviour (as a by-product), which would be quite independent of my acceptance of salvation. Since my new attitude reflects my acceptance of salvation, and since preaching is indissolubly bound up with action, preaching itself is relevent to social conduct. This is a basically different concept from the view that social conduct is merely the outcome of personal faith.

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